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# Teaching Trickster Tales: A Comparison of Instructional Approaches

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*Trickster tales, with their teachings on how to behave in the world, are a powerful means for transmitting social knowledge and cultural mores to children. In this study we compared two approaches to teaching fourth-grade students to write trickster tales. Although both instructional methods incorporated aspects of the writing process approach, only the developmentally-based method took into account students' expected developmental growth patterns in narrative composition. Statistical analyses revealed significant gains favoring the developmentally-based group participants on measures of plot structure and characterization. These results suggest that children benefit from writing instruction that considers their cognitive development.*

## Introduction

### *The Power of Stories*

Storytelling is one of the most powerful means we as humans have to capture, interpret, and share the experience of being. The creation and sharing of stories is an ancient human practice and an efficient and powerfully effective one for transmitting cultural knowledge, values and beliefs (Campbell, 1988). From toddlerhood to old age, we use narratives in our lives to articulate, reflect on, and share our interpretations of experience (McAdams, 1993; McCabe & Peterson, 1991). In schools, stories serve a primary role as vehicles for developing an understanding and appreciation of the human condition—our joys, challenges, and sorrows. Stories create templates for behavior and its interpretation and, as such, are one of the ways that cultures attribute meaning to life experiences (Bruner, 1990; Heath, 1983). Through narrative we develop a deeper understand-

* The editors and authors extend their condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Michael Pyryt, who recently passed away.



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ing of the social world—of how others think, why they behave the way they do, and the implications individuals' actions hold for others. Stories provide a means of interpreting the intentions of others, in that they make more accessible the thoughts that lie behind actions and their causes and consequences (Polkinghorne, 1988). In sum, the ability to comprehend and compose narratives is intrinsic to human life, and refining these abilities adds richness and depth to that life.

Over the past three decades, research has also established narrative as critical to a wide range of educational and psychological processes (e.g., encoding memories, identity formation, mental health, and social understanding [Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Fivush, 2001; Nelson, 2003;]), justifying Bruner's bold claim that narrative comprises one of two fundamental modes of human thought (Bruner, 1986, 1990). Given the importance of narrative thought, a study of how such a capability can be fostered and supported warrants the attention of educators. More specifically, the way children develop narrative understanding is an important concern of literacy teachers, curriculum designers, publishers of educational materials, educational policy makers, and educational psychologists.

Of course, not all narrative is alike in structure, style, function, or form. Narratives come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from personal reflections to folk tales to historical fiction to anecdotes. How do children learn to understand and compose these various narrative genres? Furthermore, which should be given the most attention in school, how should these best be taught, and does it matter when we teach them? Although questions like these are still largely unanswered, there is a growing interest in learning more about genre-based approaches to writing instruction (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Halliday, 1994). Grabe (2002) argued for the need to improve instructional practice at the level of narrative and expository macrogenres. The work of Berman and Nir-Sagiv (2004) supports this stance. Although students were better at constructing the openings of narrative texts than those of expository texts, proficient openings were not evident in either genre until late in development (Berman & Katzenberger, 2004). Further, although students as young as nine or ten years of age can differentiate between narrative and expository genres, only with age can they combine elements of expository and narrative in their text construction (Berman & Nir-Sagiv, 2004).

Instruction in finer gradations of genre has also been explored. Research has investigated instructional procedures for building students' understanding of writing in certain sub-genres. Pang (2002) found that when students studied the language features, textual organization, and contextual aspects of a film review they became more capable of writing in that genre. Swales and Lindemann (2002) guided post-secondary students through the composition of a sample literature review, using a process that included significant discourse about various ways in which the text could be organized. A concern for the difficulties struggling writers encounter has led some to search for more appropriate instructional approaches.

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Instruction with genre-specific planning and self-regulating strategies has been found to result in better performance by students with learning disabilities, when compared with less explicit approaches (Graham & Harris, 2005). There has also been considerable interest in a genre approach to writing instruction with students learning English as a second language (Hyland, 2003; Hyon, 2002; Johns, 2002), promoting the idea that such instruction can better prepare these students for success with the types of writing expected within academic and career contexts. In addition, there has been significant interest among educators in using published texts, such as picture books, across many genres, as models in helping students compose their own texts (for example, see Harwayne, 2001; Robb, 2004; Woodray, 1999).

The current study examined and compared two methods for teaching children to compose a narrative (i.e., a developmentally-based approach and the conventional method used in the school attended by participants). The study targeted a specific genre, trickster tales, as a developmentally appropriate narrative genre for children at the age of those in the study. Furthermore, it sought to build upon existing research into pathways of children's cognitive development, particularly as this pertains to emerging narrative abilities. We start with a review of the literature pertaining to the development of children's storytelling ability, followed by a description of the study's methods, including our participants, the instructional procedures, and measures and scoring. Next we report our results, with statistical analyses. Finally, in our discussion we compare the instructional approaches and outline implications for classroom application. Sample student stories, with explanations of the way they were scored, are included in the Appendix.

## *The Development of Children's Storytelling Capability*

Research has shown that children's storytelling ability becomes increasingly complex over time (Mandler & Goodman, 1982; McKeough, 1992; Nelson, 1996; Stein, 1988; Sutton-Smith, 1981). Dual forces underpin this capacity: neurological maturation, which enables more complex cognitive processing (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Case, 1985), and immersion in educational, social and cultural environments, which provide supports, models, and guidance in scaffolding and facilitating the development of expertise (Bruner, 1986; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hicks, 2001; McCabe, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Over time, children seem simultaneously to internalize the cultural forms of narrative that are typical of their context, and grow in their ability to apply those forms in increasingly more complex and coherent ways. But how does this come about?

The seminal work of Nelson (2003) and of Fivush and Haden (2003) on autobiographical memory highlights the role culture and social context play in the development of even the earliest stories children tell. This capacity derives from an understanding of people as actors who share intentions and attention (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). Moreover, the expression of

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narrative meaning making is shaped by cultural forms of language: the ways specific languages allow the representation of narrative components such as people, space, and time (Nelson, 1996); and how such references develop in narrative discourse across the life span (Bamberg, 1987). Experience with cultural forms of literacy also shapes language learning (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002) and narrative development (Fang, 2001). When children write stories they initially adopt the conventions they see in the books they read and have read to them, and only gradually come to see text as an autonomous aesthetic object (Fang, 2001). Research has shown that certain cognitive and language-related skills support written language development, including the ability to generate inferences, use strategies, and construct coherent and integrated narratives (Cain & Oakhill, 2007). Clearly, the development of written narrative is non-uniform and complex (Fang, 2001).

Working within a neo-Piagetian theoretical framework, Case and his colleagues have constructed a detailed map of developmental growth in children's and adolescents' story composition (Case & Okamoto, 1996; McKeough, 1992; McKeough & Genereux, 2003). Case (1985) proposed four major stages of general cognitive development, each comprising increasingly complex cognitive structures. Within each of these major stages there is a recursive progression through three substages, made possible by two factors: increased cognitive processing capacity and experience in the domain. Within each major stage, these three substages involve first coordinating two schemata, then, applying two coordinated schemata in succession, and finally integrating and applying them simultaneously.

When this general model of cognitive development is applied to the domain of story composition, an explanation is provided for the changes in the structure of problem-based or goal-based stories that have been documented in the literature (Mandler & Goodman, 1982; McCabe, 1996). When storytelling, the typical 4-year-old produces a short but coherent scripted episode that is largely action-based and tells of the physical world (Case & McKeough, 1990). In this same age range, children construct a schema for representing mental states (Astington, 2001; Pelletier & Astington, 2004). It is not until approximately six years of age, however, that children use these two different schemata in a coordinated fashion in their stories (Case & McKeough, 1990). This yields a qualitatively different type of narrative—one that is goal or problem driven rather than scripted. We refer to these narratives as *intentional*, because the intentions of the characters drive the plot (McKeough, 1992). By approximately eight years of age, a failed attempt or sub-problem is typically included in the plot line and by age ten, story components are integrated into a more elaborate resolution (McKeough, 1992; McKeough, 2000).

Writing research has demonstrated that a second qualitative shift in narrative thought occurs between 10- and 12-years of age. Whereas most 10-year-olds focus on immediate, proximal intentions and mental states, by age 12, storytellers

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begin to interpret the intentions of characters in terms of enduring, trans-situational mental states and character traits (McKeough, 2000; Yussen & Ozcan, 1996), producing what we refer to as *interpretive* narratives (McKeough, 2000). To illustrate, a character's resistance to joining a group activity might lead to his being referred to as *a loner* and be explained in terms of a personal history of rejection and ridicule. Reference to such traits and prior social experiences suggests that, by age 12, young people are able to simultaneously consider two or more experiences that occurred at different times or in different situations and then extract a higher-order unit of meaning making, such as a personality trait or an enduring psychological state. By age 14, additional enduring psychological states and traits are included, often creating a struggle within the characters as competing character traits war with each other. For example, a story character might be torn between wanting to be part of the *cool* group but wanting to live alcohol and drug free (McKeough & Genereux, 2003).

This research also suggests that, over time, children become increasingly more proficient at creating believable and lifelike characters in their narratives. In other words, they seem to become better with what Kirkland and Davies (1987) identified as three principles of convincing characterization: consistency, motivation and plausibility. Characters must behave in a consistent way (unless sufficient reason has been given for the change), their motivations must be reasonably clear, and they must seem plausible and life-like. In short, characters should not be presented as black and white but rather as multi-faceted (Card, 1988; Kirkland & Davies, 1987; Kress, 1998). Over time, young people become more adept at including what Kress (1998) described as the two important aspects of characterization: external factors (e.g., physical characteristics, dialogue, occupations and setting) and internal factors (e.g., thoughts, attitudes, memories, and dreams). As they become more proficient at characterization, developing the inner qualities of their characters, their narratives improve because readers are better able to assign meaning to characters' actions, intentions and circumstances.

Thus, research has shown that, with development, children's narratives become more complex in at least two key aspects: complexity of characters and complexity of plot (McKeough & Genereux, 2003; McKeough, 2000). On one hand, children deepen their understanding and portrayal of characters as they grow. Young children's narratives contain characters that are simply instruments of an action script. As they grow older, children's stories include characters whose motivations and feelings drive action. By early adolescence, they are able to create story characters whose actions are interpreted through reference to enduring traits and/or personal histories, and who demonstrate multiple and contrasting mental states. On the other hand, as they grow older, children are increasingly able to compose more complex and coherent plot structures. These two aspects of narrative development dovetail, as children's narratives progress from simple action

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scripts, to goal-driven sequences, to plots incorporating impediments to goals, through to stories of plight where characters struggle to interpret the meanings of their own and others' actions (Feldman, Bruner, Kalmar, & Renderer, 1993; McKeough & Genereux, 2003). That is, children's narratives begin in what Bruner (1986) described as a *landscape of action* and gradually incorporate what he called a *landscape of consciousness*, where characters' perceptions, feelings, and understandings of their world become central to the story.

Instruction-based studies, in which typical developmental sequences were recapitulated through carefully tailored instruction, have demonstrated that narrative performance can be enhanced for average children (McKeough, Davis, Forgeron, Marini, & Fung, 2005; McKeough & Sanderson, 1996) and children with learning disabilities (McKeough, 1995). Conceptual mnemonics (graphic, oral, textual and/or motoric) served to scaffold narrative performance by creating a bridge from the child's entering level to the next point in the developmental sequence.

## *The Present Study*

### Rationale and Questions

Exposing children to stories that are at a suitable level for their age has been typical practice for a long time. But novel to this study was the careful selection of a literary genre that coincided with the cognitive leaps predicted for the participants by narrative development theory. According to research in narrative development, children at age eight and nine are on the cusp of developing stories in which "the engine of action" (Bruner, 1986, p. 37) resides less in the plot and more in the character (Feldman, et al., 1993). Although children at this age have typically grasped the concept of sub-problems and complications within stories, these form the core of their narratives, with stereotypical characters playing primarily action roles. Children at this age do not typically include characters with rich inner worlds, plots with sequences deliberately designed for audience effect, or well-integrated resolutions—but they are ready to learn how. Thus, the time is right for them to explore a narrative genre that includes these elements.

Trickster tales fit the bill for a number of reasons (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975). First, this genre requires that children particularly attend to characters' intentions. Unlike simpler problem-centered plot structures of many folk tales, in trickster tales the plot is driven by character. Tricksters themselves create the tale's impetus. Second, trickster tales require the manipulation of more than one perspective. The interpretations (and misinterpretations) that others assign to a trickster's deceptions constitute a central feature of a trickster tale. Third, trickster tales employ tension between fair/unfair social boundaries and the individuals who attempt to circumvent them. This friction calls forth deliberate plot construction to achieve a rising sense of tension for the reader. In writing a trickster tale, children are challenged to design a sequence of events to create a particular effect on the

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reader. Fourth, trickster tales generally have an underlying moral theme, and function as story tools for building core cultural values, particularly of social responsibility (Biallas, 1986; Jung, 1956; Lopez, 1977). In composing a trickster tale, children are challenged to think about the rightness and wrongness of particular actions within a social context. Finally, trickster tales from cultures around the globe are available as picture books, and these span the various reading abilities usually found among eight- and nine-year-old children, allowing differentiated access. As an added bonus, trickster tales are often quite humorous, and children of this age usually find them very interesting and enjoyable.

The major question of this study: Which of two methods of instruction (i.e., a newly designed developmentally-based approach and the conventional instructional approach used in the school) best supports children in learning to compose a trickster tale? is nested inside a larger one: What can be done instructionally to foster children's narrative development?

## Method

### *Participants*

Participating in the study were two classes of grade 4 students enrolled in a publicly funded elementary school situated in a largely middle-class neighborhood of a large urban center in Western Canada. Forty-four students were eligible for participation. Of the 41 fourth-grade students who returned completed consent forms, the stories of two were dropped from the study because of limited English language proficiency, and one other was eliminated because of an extended illness during the period of the research. The ages of the 38 students who remained ranged from 8 years, 9 months to 9 years, 9 months (mean age 9 years, 2.5 months). Students were randomly assigned to one of the two treatment groups, developmentally-based or conventional, each comprised of 19 students (8 girls and 11 boys in each). Participants' scores on the Vocabulary Subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children III (Weschler, 1999), which is considered a useful measure of general intellectual ability and expressive vocabulary and which was administered and scored in the standard fashion (Sattler, 1992), demonstrated a range of functioning from Borderline to Very Superior, with a mean subtest scaled score in the average range (11.32, SD = 3.43). The mean subtest scaled score for the conventional group was 10.79, with a range from 5 to 15. The mean subtest scaled score for the developmentally-based group was 11.84, ranging from 5 to 19.

Thirty-six of the 38 participants completed third-grade Ministry of Education writing achievement tests in May of the previous school year. For this assessment, students were asked to write stories in response to a prompt, and their compositions were evaluated for content, organization (10 marks each), sentence structure, vocabulary, and conventions (five marks each) for a total possible score of 35. The acceptable standard for this examination ranged from 17 to 27, with

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the standard of excellence set from 28 to 35. Of all the Alberta students who wrote the test, 10.3% did not reach the acceptable standard whereas 89.7% achieved or exceeded the acceptable standard. Of this latter group of students, 18.4% attained the standard of excellence. Among the 18 students with available test results in the conventional group, the mean score in writing was 24.83, with a range of 18 to 35. Within the developmentally-based group, 18 students had available results, with a mean of 24.11 and a range of 16 to 31.

Each of the two classroom teachers had taught grade four students for a minimum of three years, and had been employed as a teacher for at least six years. Both held Bachelor degrees in Education with a specialization at the elementary level. Both were female and had a professional interest in writing instruction. Over the course of their professional careers, both had attended numerous professional development workshops in language arts. Trickster tale materials were made available to the teachers to support instruction. Extensive discussion took place between the two teachers prior to beginning the study, focusing on the elements and qualities of the trickster tale genre.

### *Trickster Tale Assessment Procedures*

Participants were asked to compose three different stories involving tricksters and tricks. One story was composed prior to instruction in writing a trickster tale, one during this instruction, and one approximately two months after instruction ended. The initial story prompt allowed for a pre-instruction baseline to be established for each of the participants. Stories written during instruction provided a measure of growth in story writing ability throughout instruction and the third story offered some measure of learning retention. For the first story, the following writing prompt was given: "In the form of a story, write about a character who tricks someone to get what he or she wants." Before children wrote their stories, a short whole group discussion about characters and what they might want occurred. Stories written during instruction were products of the specific instruction procedures described below. The original prompt was used again when stories were written two months after instruction.

### *Instruction Procedures*

Trickster tale writing instruction took place over seven 40-minute sessions and fifteen 75-minute sessions occurring over an eight week time period. General aims for instruction were established at the outset for each group. Specific procedures are described below as they occurred. The two groups tended to complete blocks of instruction at slightly different rates, but always within two instruction sessions.

Instruction was divided into five blocks for both groups. During the first block, the two groups received the same instruction from one teacher. This block was devoted to building general understandings of the trickster tale genre, exposing the students to published trickster tales and discussing the nature of tricksters and

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their tricks. More specifically, students discussed the relationship between tricks and the creation of pretense. Six trickster tales that represented a range of types of tricksters were read aloud to each class. Following the reading, students created a character web for each of the tricksters, including brief notes about each trickster's internal qualities (e.g., clever, selfish, funny) and motivations (e.g., likes to be admired, wants to protect his family). To build students' understanding of the nature of tricksters and trickster tales, a collection of 25-30 children's published trickster tales was delivered to each classroom. Throughout the duration of the research project, students were encouraged to select books from this collection for independent reading.

At the conclusion of this initial block of instruction, students were randomly assigned to either the developmentally-based or conventional instruction groups. The topics of instruction during each subsequent block were consistent across the groups. Block 2 involved further exploration of trickster tales and focused on developing understanding of story plot structure and character. The third instruction block involved all students in planning their own trickster tale while the fourth block was dedicated to drafting tales. The fifth block of instruction included the final publication and celebration of the children's writing. Although the topics for each block were the same for the two instructional groups and students had access to the same published trickster tales, the instructional focus within the topics differed for the two groups (see Table 1).

### Conventional Group Instruction

Block 2 instruction for the conventional group focused on problem/resolution plot structures and characterization. The teacher guided students in a discussion of possible ideas for story problems for a trickster tale. For several of the story problems suggested, the teacher led students in a discussion about options for happy and sad endings. These ideas were written on the blackboard. A sample story problem was chosen as a model, and students worked individually to generate ideas for potential happy and sad resolutions. Next, students were asked to generate three or four ideas for trickster tale problems on their own. For each of these, they were asked to think of both a happy and a sad solution.

The teacher also worked with students to extend their understanding of character. Instruction emphasized including descriptive details about characters in the stories. To assist students with understanding characterization, the teacher also asked students to complete several worksheets. On these, they were given pictures of characters, and asked to write down ideas in various categories. These included writing ideas about the character's favorite things (e.g., colors, animals, foods) and details of his or her appearance (e.g., eye/hair color, clothing, size).

During Block 3, the conventional group teacher asked each student to select one of the problem-solution pairs they individually generated in Block 2 for their trickster tale. The teacher modeled the process of using a problem/resolution for-

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TABLE 1: **Focus of Instruction Blocks**

| Instruction Block | Conventional Approach | Developmentally-based Approach |
|---|---|---|
| **Block 1: Introduction to Trickster Tales** | • Discussed nature of tricksters and their tricks, including creation of pretence<br>• Listened to six trickster tales (TT)<br>• Created trickster character webs, including appearance and internal qualities/ motivations | |
| **Block 2: Exploring plot structure and character** | • Discussed problem/resolution plots<br>• Group generated ideas for story plot problems<br>• One problem selected; individuals generated happy vs. sad endings<br>• Individuals generated ideas for 3-4 story plot problems with options for happy and sad endings<br>• Discussed importance of descriptive details about characters<br>• Given sample pictures of characters, individuals generated details: favorite things and appearance | • Discussed tension in TT plots<br>• Two TTs read<br>• Event sequence plotted on tension line; below (negative effect) or above (positive effect restoring equilibrium)<br>• TT read aloud; the three tricking event sequences of the plot discussed<br>• First trick sequence sketched; students supplied words for speech/ thought bubbles<br>• Students completed characters' speech/thought bubbles for subsequent two trick sequences |
| **Block 3: Planning a trickster tale** | • Students chose one idea for a problem and resolution plot<br>• Teacher modeled writing plan, with problem, characters, setting, events and ending, using first, next, then ...<br>• Students generated character web, (name, age, what he or she liked to do, appearance, and kind of person)<br>• Individuals conferred with teacher concerning TT plot/character plan | • Discussed differences between positive and negative trickster characters<br>• Students created positive or negative character, using web (e.g., names, desires, fears, goals and appearance)<br>• Students plotted events on tension line; encouraged to create rise of tension followed by balance restoration |
| **Block 4: Drafting a trickster tale** | • Students wrote story draft, using a separate sheet for each section (introduction, first, next, then)<br>• Individuals conferred with teacher and peers<br>• Proofreading checklist used individually<br>• Individual students conferred with teacher, discussing revisions | • Teacher modeled: students sketched trick event sequence of their own TT, including characters' speech/ thought bubbles. Story plot described in text under each series of pictures.<br>• Students encouraged to revise drawings/text<br>• Individual students conferred with teacher & peers |
| **Block 5: Publication** | • Students wrote final draft of TT | • Discussed/demonstrated ways authors include characters' thoughts in stories<br>• Students wrote final story |
| | • Adult volunteers typed final stories | |

mat as a story-writing plan on the blackboard. Each step was modeled and described by the teacher, after which students were asked to complete their own plan. First, students were to write the word, "Problem," at the top of a sheet of paper and briefly describe the story problem they had selected. Under this, they were asked to write the names of their story characters and to describe the story's

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setting. At the bottom of their page, students were asked to write the label "Finally," and write down the final solution they had chosen for their tale. Next, they were expected to write a brief description of the story events using the framework, "First, Next, Then." Students were also guided in the construction of their main character. The teacher modeled the process of creating a character web on the blackboard. Then, students were asked to complete a web for their main character, including name, age, things he or she liked to do, physical appearance, and what kind of person he or she was. Throughout these activities, the teacher circulated among students and provided individual guidance as needed. Once these activities were completed, each student was involved in an individual conference with the teacher to review and discuss their trickster tale plans for clarity and overall sense.

In Block 4, conventional group students were asked to use their trickster tale plan to compose a first draft of their story. In composing this draft, they were asked to use the format: Introduction (i.e., story setting, a character description, and important background information), First, Next, Then, and Finally, and to write each section on a separate sheet of paper. While students worked on their composition, the teacher was available for individual conferences with students, guiding and encouraging them as they worked. Once their first drafts were complete, students were introduced to a proofreading checklist. The teacher explained how this would be used by students to check for capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and sentence sense. Students then individually went through their writing using the checklist, editing and revising as appropriate. Once this was complete, every student conferenced individually with their teacher to review their writing and discuss possible revisions. Throughout this block of instruction, students were given opportunities to confer with teacher and peers.

Finally, in Block 5, after revising and editing their work, students in the conventional group completed a final draft of their stories. Volunteer parents typed the students' final drafts, and corrected any remaining errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing.

### Developmentally-Based Group Instruction

For children in the developmentally-based group, instruction in Block 2 began with a discussion and examination of tension in the plots of trickster tales. As a metaphor for story tension, the teacher used a toy Jack-in-the-box, winding the crank until the internal spring could tolerate no more tension and released. Multiple story events, it was explained, increase tension in a way that paralleled the phrase sequences in the Jack-in-the-box tune. To demonstrate the notion of tension in a narrative plot further, the teacher had two children demonstrate a tug-of-war with a blanket. One was asked to tug a little of the blanket over to her side in a sequence of three tugs. Finally, at the third tug, the other student was instructed to yank the blanket back. This action was discussed in relation to

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tension in a trickster tale, as one character often tries to get more than his or her fair share, until a final event restores justice. The teacher read two trickster tales aloud to the students, and demonstrated on the blackboard the sequence of the story events along a plot line. Story events were placed either above or below a central line of equilibrium, depending on whether each was negative or positive.

Following this, a model trickster tale, *The Tale of Tricky Fox,* (Aylesworth, 2000) was read aloud and the teacher led the students in a large group discussion and identification of each of the three trick sequences. A large sheet of paper was divided into four sections to represent the sequence of events comprising the first trick in the story. On this grid, the teacher drew one character in each box, with the negative character in the top two sections, and the positive character in the bottom two sections. As each character was drawn, students were asked what he or she said, and this dialogue was added to speech bubbles. Next, following McKeough and Sanderson (1996) and Pelletier and Astington (2004), the students were asked to articulate what each character was thinking, and the teacher recorded these words in thought bubbles. After this process was completed with the initial trick sequence, students were given individual copies of the drawings, and asked to add speech and thought bubbles to the two subsequent trick sequences in the story. This activity was meant to focus students' attention on the characters' interior mental states and highlight the contrast between what the trickster said and secretly intended.

During Block 3, developmentally-based group students were first asked to create a trickster character. The teacher reviewed differences between positive and negative tricksters, and students were asked to decide which their character would be. They were then asked to construct a character web that included their tricksters' strengths, weaknesses, desires, fears, and goals. To further scaffold the interior focus, it was suggested that students select names and describe appearance in a way that reflected their characters' personalities. Next, students were asked to plot their own story events using the story tension graphic scaffold, demonstrating a rise in tension followed by a restoration of balance.

During Block 4 of instruction, the students in the developmentally-based group were asked to create a story plan in which each trick sequence of their tale was illustrated. Speech and thought bubbles that showed what characters were saying and secretly thinking were included and story action was briefly described underneath. The teacher modeled this process for students with an original trickster tale story sequence. As students worked through the process of planning their own stories, they were encouraged to revise their drawings and story ideas as they wished. Opportunities were provided for students to conference with the teacher and their peers.

Prior to converting their graphic story plans into a final trickster tale during Block 5, developmentally-based group students were involved in class discussion

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about how authors include characters' thoughts in a narrative format. Excerpts of text from published trickster tales were shared, and the teacher guided a discussion about the kinds of specific language these authors used to convey a character's inner thoughts. Finally, students translated their graphic story plan into narrative text. The stories were given to volunteer parent typists, who corrected any remaining errors in writing conventions, as was done with conventional group stories.

Students in both instructional groups participated in a final celebration of their work, which included a presentation from a magician, refreshments, and, most importantly, an opportunity to share their completed trickster tales with peers.

Many aspects of instruction were similar between the two classes. Large group instruction, modeling, and discussion were typically followed by individual activities. Graphic organizers and planning tools were utilized in each classroom, to assist students with thinking about, planning and revising their stories prior to the final draft. Teachers offered individual support to students as needed, and conferences between teachers and individual students were common. Both teachers frequently referred to trickster tales that were published and these were available as references to the students. Students were given opportunities to discuss their writing with one another, although not all took advantage of this in either group. A positive classroom atmosphere was present in both settings, with children encouraged to take risks with their writing and to explore new territory.

In contrast, three key differences distinguished the instruction offered to the conventional and developmentally-based groups. In short, these were (a) a focus on temporal event sequence versus tension in plot, (b) a focus on story problem versus story character, and (c) a focus on the inner worlds versus the outer worlds of characters (see Figure 1).

## *Measures and Scoring*

### Story Performance Data

Each story written by students was scored on two dimensions: plot structure and characterization. These two elements were targeted for two reasons: First, within the trickster tales genre, plot and characterization are uniquely linked in that the forward movement of the plot is bound to characters' natures. Second, research has demonstrated that a transition toward plot structure complexity and using characters' mental states to drive plot typically occurs at the age of the participants in the study (Applebee, 1978; McKeough, 1992).

The development of the scoring schemes was guided by Case's neo-Piagetian theory (Case, 1985; Case & Okamoto, 1996) and developmental and instruction studies that tested the theory (e.g., Case & McKeough, 1990; McKeough, et al., 2005). An existing developmental scheme for assessing the structural complexity of stories composed by 4- to 18-year-olds, based on Case's theory (Case & McKeough,

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| Conventional group was directed to: | Both groups were engaged in instruction regarding: | Developmentally-based group was directed to: |
|---|---|---|
| Attend to temporal sequence of events | **Creating story plot** | Manipulate story tension through deliberate selection of sequence of events |
| Base story on a problem that the main character encountered and attempted to solve | **Establishing a focus for the story** | Base story on a character whose actions created a problem |
| Attend to and include outer aspects of character, such as appearance, as well as inner qualities, such as general likes and dislikes | **Creating a story character** | Attend to the inner qualities of character, such as intentions, hidden desires, and attempts to manipulate others' perceptions, while including outer details specifically chosen to support the portrayal of these inner qualities |

FIGURE 1: *Differences in Focus of Instruction between the Two Instructional Approaches*

1990; McKeough, 1992; McKeough & Genereux, 2003), served as a starting point for developing rubrics for scoring trickster tale plot structure and characterization. The original scoring scheme, developed by the second author, focused exclusively on plot structure and was not focused on any particular genre. The adapted plot structure scoring scheme added features particular to trickster tales as well as delineating a finer gradient by identification of sub-levels within each level. The specific focus on character in the present study was occasioned by the central role characters play in trickster tales, and, following Case (1985), considered the processing demands of creating these characters. These rubrics captured the range of performance of the participants (i.e., spanning levels 2 to 5 of the original scoring scheme that ranged from level 0 to 7). The literature on children's growing competency in creating story plots and characters testifies to the face validity of the scoring schemes. To score the stories on each dimension, the primary rater, who was enrolled in graduate school, read each story and scored it using the plot rubric first, followed by the character rubric. All stories were read through once before scoring commenced to gain a global sense of them. Then, each story was read and scored on the plot dimension, then read again and scored on the character dimension. When all stories were scored once, the cycle was completed again to ensure the accuracy of the score. In cases where the rater had difficulty assign-

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ing a consistent score, stories were read again and rescored. This process was completed over a one-month period. Brief descriptions of the rubrics follow and, to illustrate the application of the rubrics, sample stories are presented in the Appendix, along with an explanation of the way in which they were analyzed and scored.

### Plot Structure Rubrics

Stories scored at level 2 have plots that are goal driven and, as such, require young writers to coordinate characters' actions and mental states. Stories scored at level 3 include a dual focus on the main story plot and a sub-plot or complications. These are not, however, well coordinated within an overall story purpose or design, such that there is a sense of shifting focus from one event to another, or between the main story plot and sub-plots. Although the story's main events are temporally sequenced, details may be included that are confusing or tangential. Additionally, story resolution may be abrupt, lacking a well-planned feeling. In stories scored at level 4, plot and sub-plots are linked together in a purposeful way, giving the story a sense of deliberate planning. Closure is achieved in a way that addresses the main theme or purpose, although it may appear contrived. Level 5 stories represent a qualitative shift in plot structure, as young writers begin to consider their audience, deliberately constructing event sequences to manipulate readers' predictions and create tension. Additionally, they provide imaginative and effective details to make the story more richly textured and believable (see Table 2 for the summarized plot rubric).

### Characterization Rubrics

The rubrics for scoring characterization reflect participants' growing capacity to apply their developing understanding of characters' inner psychological worlds to the construction of a narrative. In level 2 stories, the main character's actions and intentions are coordinated, although his or her mental states are described in simple terms and categorization of the character is very basic. Level 3 stories typically include the perspective of a second character, but this second perspective is dealt with minimally. Additionally, although a character's physical appearance and mental world may be described, the two are not well integrated. At level 4, the main character's inner world is considerably elaborated compared to level 3. An increased facility with managing more than one mental state results in more complex characters and a stronger role for character in driving the narrative. These young writers coordinate descriptions and dialogue to support a cohesive and consistent representation of a character's inner world and manage to make characters' interior qualities integral to the plot. The perspective of a second character is also somewhat elaborated in that the deliberate manipulation of his or her perceptions is often specified. A qualitative shift in the manner in which characters are depicted occurs at level 5 as psychological interpretation begins to play a stronger role in the movement of the story. Enduring qualities, reasons,

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TABLE 2: **Plot Scoring Scheme**

| Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Plot centers on established goal<br>• Event sequence involves changing goals, not integrated<br>• Closure reached but goals may or may not be reached | • Plot includes subplots and complications with failed attempts to reach goal<br>• One or more tricking event included<br>• Clearly sequenced but implausible events<br>• Insufficient context to create tension<br>• Closure involves justice, but is abrupt | • Plot involves attempts to achieve clear goal, but no explanation of why tricks fail/succeed<br>• Goal furthered by deliberately planned events<br>• Details make plot easy to understand<br>• Closure includes justice, but is more contrived than life-like or natural | • Plot involves knowledge of victim's vulnerabilities, used to play imaginative, effective tricks<br>• Cohesive, planned events cause tension, and manipulate readers' predictions<br>• Closure attained through realistic justice |
| BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 |
| • Complications implied but not described<br>• Multiple but unintegrated goal sequence included | • One detailed well-planned trick sequence<br>• Series of similar events included but have circumstantial quality | • Trickster performs two or more different, imaginative, effective tricks on character(s) to reach a goal | • Contrasting goals and actions reflect life-like qualities/flaws<br>• Closure accounts for positive and negative elements |

underlying motivations, and contrasting traits may appear in portrayals of characters, establishing a context such that characters' thoughts, actions, dialogue, and emotional responses take on a more believable and cohesive feel. The perspectives of other characters are further developed as the main character uses their specific vulnerabilities to manipulate their thoughts and feelings (see Table 3 for the summarized character rubric).

## Results

Statistical analyses of participants' stories before, during, and after instruction, across instructional groups, for plot structure and characterization were conducted. To test for the differences between the two instructional groups across time, a repeated measures MANOVA was performed. Mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.

Multivariate testing revealed a significant overall group effect [Wilks Lambda = .76, $F(2,35) = 5.24$, $p < .01$, partial *eta* squared = .24. There was also a significant time effect, [Wilks Lambda = .48, $F(4,33 = 8.91$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .52]. The Time by Group interaction effect was also significant [Wilks Lambda = .469, $F(4,31) = 9.12$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .53].

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TABLE 3: **Character Scoring Scheme**

| Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Trickster's perspective included<br>• Victim's perspective not considered<br>• Story drift between first and third person<br>• Basic mental states of characters described<br>• Characters described using basic categorical terms<br>• Character holds explicit or implied intention to reach goal | • Trickster's psychological traits general, but reflected in action<br>• Trickster may manipulate victim, but not through pretense<br>• Development of trickster's inner world limited<br>• Victim's perspective briefly mentioned<br>• Characters' physical qualities have little to do with plot<br>• Characters' dialogue is action oriented | • Trickster's mental inner world consistent and coherent through details<br>• Trickster sees and manipulates victims, but this lacks credibility<br>• Trickster acts stereotypically, using generic desires or fears to easily fool others<br>• Victim's perspective present, but developed unrealistically<br>• Why characters have motivations or beliefs not well explained | • Trickster uses knowledge of victim's vulnerabilities to convincingly manipulate his or her perceptions<br>• Trickster neither perfectly good nor bad, has contrasting traits<br>• Trickster/victim show enduring qualities<br>• Details create context, making characters' thoughts, actions, appearance, speech, and emotions lifelike, consistent, cohesive, and believable |
| BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 | BONUS + .5 |
| • Trickster's hidden motivations mentioned, but are inconsistent or unclear and difficult to infer because detail is lacking | • Characters' emotional responses included and supported by actions and speech<br>• Goals of contrasting characters explicitly identified | • Contrasting characters' mental states detailed<br>• Trickster's goals have a psychological orientation | • Victim's perspective made clear<br>• At least two lifelike characters are portrayed |

Two repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to identify the sources of the significant multivariate effects. On the plot structure measure, there was a significant instructional group effect [$F(1,36) = 9.95$, $p < .01$, partial *eta* squared = .22]. For within subjects effects, there was a significant time effect [$F(2,72) = 11.35$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .24] and a significant Time by Group interaction [$F(2,72) = 10.95$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .23]. Simple effects testing showed that although no significant differences in plot structure were found between the groups on the stories they wrote prior to instruction, significant differences did emerge on stories written during instruction [$F(1,36) = 16.36$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .31] and post instruction [$F(1,36) = 10.81$, $p < .01$, partial

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TABLE 4: **Trickster Tale Mean Plot and Characterization Scores (with standard deviations) by Group over Time (score ranges are in italics)**

| Time | Plot structure scores | | Characterization scores | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CONVENTIONAL | DEVELOPMENTAL | CONVENTIONAL | DEVELOPMENTAL |
| Before instruction | 3.42<br>(.53)<br>*2.5-4.5* | 3.39<br>(.54)<br>*2.5-5* | 3.50<br>(.65)<br>*2.5-4.5* | 3.42<br>(.75)<br>*2.5-5.5* |
| During instruction | 3.47<br>(.70)<br>*2-4.5* | 4.34<br>(.62)<br>*3.5-5.5* | 3.55<br>(.72)<br>*2-4.5* | 4.39<br>(.54)<br>*3.5-5.5* |
| After instruction | 3.34<br>(.78)<br>*2-4.5* | 4.16<br>(.75)<br>*3-5.5* | 3.37<br>(.78)<br>*2-4.5* | 4.39<br>(.72)<br>*3-5.5* |

*eta* squared = .23]. An inspection of the means (see Table 1) reveals that the developmentally-based group outperformed the conventional group on plot structure scores for stories written during and following instruction.

In the analysis of characterization, a similar pattern was found. There was a significant instructional group effect [$F(1,36) = 11.14$, $p < .01$, partial *eta* squared = .24]. For within subjects effects, there was a significant time effect [$F(2,72) = 10.34$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .22] and a significant Time X Group interaction [$F(2,72) = 10.95$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .25]. Simple effects testing showed that although no significant differences in characterization were found between the groups on the stories they wrote prior to instruction, significant differences did emerge on stories written during instruction [$F(1,36) = 16.46$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .31] and post instruction [$F(1,36) = 17.82$, $p < .001$, partial *eta* squared = .33]. Again, an inspection of the means (see Table 1) reveals that the developmentally-based group outscored the conventional group on stories written during and following the instruction.

To assess the reliability of the scoring rubrics, a random sample of 10% of the stories was scored independently by a second rater, using the rubrics shown in Tables 2 and 3. The second rater was blind to group membership. Identical scores were assigned to 79% of the stories, and 92% fell within .5 levels. Cronbach's Alpha was .76 overall, indicating acceptable reliability. More specifically, the inter-rater reliability for Plot was .73 and .61 (Cronbach's Alpha) for characterization. The inter-rater reliability for characterization, in particular, was somewhat low although still within the acceptable range. This, along with the small number of stories (10%) that were scored by a second rater, should be kept in mind as a limitation of the study.

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## Discussion

### *Comparison of the Instructional Approaches*

The overall mean scores of stories written before instruction, calculated across all participants, (i.e., plot = 3.41 and characterization = 3.46) were commensurate with the levels from previous developmental analyses of narrative compositions (Case & Okamoto, 1996; McKeough, 1992). Although the two groups' story scores for plot structure and characterization did not significantly differ on the original pre-instruction stories, the developmentally-based group outperformed the conventional group on the stories that were completed during instruction and those written after instruction ended. Interestingly, some conventional instruction group participants required one class session less to complete their post-test stories. One reason for this is that their story plots and characters were less complex. Notably, the gains made by the developmentally-based group during instruction were not lost two months after instruction, suggesting that the students' understanding of the composition of a trickster tale was at least somewhat stable.

Although one might say that the children simply learned what they were taught, what is notable is that this work sheds light on *what* children should be taught. The developmental analyses conducted by Case and colleagues (Case & McKeough, 1990; McKeough et al., 2005; McKeough & Sanderson, 1996) demonstrated a shift from intentional story compositions to interpretive ones at approximately 11 to 12 years of age. Moreover, research has determined that instruction should be focused just beyond students' competency level (Hicks, 2001; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978), or one substage beyond developmentally typical functioning (Case & McKeough, 1990). Thus, the approach used with developmentally-based group students targeted interpretive narrative thought (an element just beyond their typical developmental level), and supported students to interpret the intentions of story characters and portray trickster tale characters as having coherent psychological profiles. Our results suggest that the developmentally-based instructional approach, which derived its principles from research into the development of children's narrative abilities conducted by Case and colleagues, was more effective than one uninformed by these insights. If our aim is to have students write and speak with power and insight, we must provide not just opportunity to compose narratives, but research-based, developmentally appropriate instruction as well.

What, then, was particularly effective in the developmentally-based group instruction and what was the rationale behind the activities? Our analysis suggests that three sets of activities used in the developmentally-based instruction constitute its essential differences from instruction provided to the conventional group. Although we cannot be certain as to what degree each contributed to success, it is our belief that each played some part in it.

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The first set of activities involved placing an emphasis on the interior world of the story characters. We chose this emphasis because children at age eight and nine have typically consolidated intentional narrative thought (i.e., characters' actions are accounted for in terms of the mental states that underlie or are occasioned by them) and are poised to make the stage shift to interpretive thought (i.e., particular mental states are unique to particular characters due to their psychological makeup) (Case & Okamoto, 1996; McKeough & Genereux, 2003). In stories written during and post instruction, developmentally-based group participants made the characters' inner thoughts, feelings, and intentions clear to readers and additionally situated them within the characters' psychological traits. The driving force of these stories was provided by a negative character whose actions and aims moved the plotline forward. Often, these young authors kept the trickster's intentions concealed from other characters in their stories, thus sculpting their writing in such a way as to indicate that a different impression of reality was given to at least one additional character. The following two excerpts taken from the post-instruction stories of developmentally-based group participants illustrate these achievements:

> "A . . . your king has ordered me to . . . a . . . mop the floors. Ya. That's it. I'm here to mop the floors," stuttered Toto. "Hee hee hee, I'm so clever," he thought to himself.
>
> "There," she said, pretending to be relieved.

By using language such as "pretending," and "he thought to himself," the students applied mental state or metacognitive language (Astington, 2001), thus indicating that they could juggle two perspectives simultaneously: the viewpoint of the character who was being deceived, and the viewpoint of the reader who was being shown the truth. According to the characterization rubric, this provides evidence towards a scoring level of 4 or higher.

In addition, the developmentally-based group participants frequently described a character's appearance in a way that contributed directly to the purpose of the story. Such a demonstration provides support towards a score of at least 4 on the characterization rubric. For example, in the following excerpt, Jennifer (not her real name) creates not just a visual image of her character, but shapes this to support the impression she wants him to make on her readers, readying them for the *remaining story events.*

> Copper looked at the sign on the clean glass window. It said: Everything purchased is $5.00 or over. Copper looked at the money in his dirty matted hand. He only had $3.50. 'No,' he said suspiciously, 'I must have more than that!' He dug through his patched and holey pocket of his dirty and also patched brown cotton pants. He checked his filthy shirt pocket that was sewn onto his blue wool shirt. But all he pulled out were two buttons, a chocolate bar wrapper (which he had stolen and eaten) and a piece of string.

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'I'll just have to steal,' he said like he had done it a million times. 'Here goes.' He pulled his yellow and green, filthy and ripped checked tie from left to right, then tightened it. He pulled down his old folks hat with the knob on the top tight over his head, and without hesitation walked right into the beautiful store: Chocolate for the Soul.

Characterization instruction, by contrast, offered to the conventional group emphasized description of surface-level, physical features, which seemed to do little to support the meaningful integration of character descriptions and story plot. Conventional group students included descriptions of characters such as, "May liked flowers, fashion, she was quiet, smart, funny, brave, and she was also ten years old," and "Tanya had brown hair and blue eyes and Kaitlyn had black hair and blue eyes. They liked to skate and were good dancers." These descriptions tended not to be related to what happened in the story, nor did they allow the reader much insight into the personality of the character. According to the characterization rubric, this would coincide with a score of 3.

A second set of activities that may have supported the creation of higher-level trickster tales was the emphasis placed on tension rather than upon a linear, temporal ordering of events. When story events were plotted on the graphic tension scaffold, on either the positive or negative side of a central axis that represented a just balance, students became aware of an organizational framework that moved them beyond a simple temporal ordering toward a central feature of narrative, breach in the canonical (Bruner, 1990). Developmentally-based group participants frequently had a second character turn the tables on a negative trickster by playing a trick in return and, thus, restoring balance in story tension. Such a deliberate design may have encouraged students to become increasingly aware of their capacity to elicit particular emotional reactions in their readers (i.e., a rise in tension followed by a restoration of balance). On the scoring rubric for Plot, this translates into story construction that "seems deliberately planned to further purpose, providing a more cohesive feel," at a level 4 or above.

In contrast, the "introduction, first, next, then" and "finally" linear organizational frame used with conventional group participants, which was intended to assist them to sequence events and extend their stories to include failed attempts and story complications, did little to move them beyond their existing level of competency. It did not appear to help them design these episodes with an overall purpose or theme in mind. Moreover, as a plot structure involving a sequence of complications or failed attempts is typical of narrative development at age eight, the organizational framework provided for this group may have done little to scaffold more complex narratives (McKeough, 1995; McKeough et al., 2005). On the rubric for scoring Plot, this type of story construction would not reach a level 4.

Furthermore, the temporal planning frame used by the conventional group students included no reference to emotional content or social meaning. In contrast, the story tension plot and speech and thought bubbles utilized by developmentally-

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based group students referred directly to the dynamic between desires of opposing characters and between right and wrong. These activities embedded emotion into the planning process. Fox (1993), for one, criticized a story-grammarian approach to narrative instruction in which stories become problem-solving formats largely devoid of the expression and emotion that may move an audience, and suggests that without these elements, children are not very interested in the story. Regrettably, this study did not include a measure of student interest and motivation regarding their compositions, and the authors would recommend including this in subsequent investigations.

A third set of activities that may have contributed to the success of the developmentally-based instruction involved the use of multiple modes of representation (Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993; Shafrir, 1999). Developmentally-based group instruction combined multiple types of scaffolds to support children's narrative development. Pictures and graphic mnemonics represented stories visually and spatially (i.e., plot outlines using a graph-like format, and depictions of characters with speech and thought bubbles) whereas oral discussion and text represented them verbally. Cross-modal supports encourage children to represent new information in multiple forms and offer processing capacity support (Case & McKeough, 1990). Additionally, the use of such scaffolds in the present study may have reduced the amount of actual writing required of students in the planning and drafting stages. For students at eight and nine years of age, the process of completing written text can still present significant physical labor. Story planning that utilizes visual scaffolds may result in higher quality narratives, even as it eliminates some of the recopying burden involved when revising multiple handwritten drafts. Multimodal scaffolding may therefore assist children in producing narratives of a higher developmental level while at the same time reducing the graphomotor demands of composition. Moreover, this study suggests that appropriate teacher scaffolding can play a major role in facilitating children's composition of more complex written texts.

In addition, trickster tales have a distinct social and moral dimension. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that during the course of this study it became increasingly apparent to the researchers that children's understanding of story was related to their understanding of social and moral realms. Piaget (1932) and others (Kohlberg, 1984; Selman, 1971, 1976; Turiel, 1969) have pointed to a relationship between cognitive development and growth in children's moral and social judgment. Of particular pertinence here is Selman's suggestion that children develop increasingly more sophisticated abilities in social perspective taking from early childhood to adolescence. Ability to incorporate more than a single perspective into a story was found to be one of the developmental markers for level of narrative maturity in the current study. This appears to corroborate Polkinghorne's (1988) analysis of stories as providing a means of interpreting the intentions of

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others, leading to deeper understandings of one's social world. The learning experiences in which developmentally-based children participated appeared to foster their awareness of and insights into human behavior, for instance, of how an individual's beliefs and desires drive their actions, and the fairness/unfairness of these within a bigger social context.

As closely as trickster tales are bound up with moral and social issues, these are not enough to constitute a purpose for reading, writing, and teaching them. Prolific children's author Jane Yolen (2000) admonished, "Story is not a moral," (p. 84) and warns against constructing stories for the sake of imparting moral lessons. The liveliness of individual voice, the accomplishment of capturing thoughts, ideas, and images in words, the engaging of imagination in the creation of something novel from nothing, and the igniting of emotion—all of these are primary purposes for guiding children to become skillful recorders of original narratives. As this study appears to demonstrate, teachers may be more effective in helping young writers reach these goals when narrative development, both students' existing levels and those that are expected to emerge, are given careful consideration.

### *Classroom Applications*

What does this study contribute to discussion about good practices for classroom writing instruction? The study offers some insight into what may be possible for future directions in writing instruction. Findings suggest that knowledge of the patterns associated with children's typical cognitive development can provide valuable information to guide teachers' expectations about children's writing performance. Such knowledge can inform what are chosen as appropriate tasks and text forms in writing instruction at particular ages. It also suggests that an understanding of children's narrative development can help teachers create specific targets for writing growth geared to students' current levels of development, and thereby also facilitate writing assessment. To illustrate, existing developmental analysis suggested that children at the age level of our participants (both groups) are capable of understanding instruction aimed at developing psychologically oriented plots and characters. Such an understanding would assist with differentiation for young writers who experienced difficulties or who exhibited exceptional talent, as each student's levels of narrative development could be identified (or at least estimated) using a rubric, such as the rubrics for trickster tales demonstrated here. This type of assessment would provide teachers with information useful in setting directions for instruction and in planning appropriate scaffolds to support each student's growth as a writer. Do we know all we need to know to design instructional programs like this? Hardly. But the current study does provide some important possibilities for further investigation. For instance, what else can we learn about the types of genres, sub-genres and text forms that are appropriate for students at particular levels of development? When

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is it most appropriate to teach particular aspects of literary craft? What instructional strategies are most useful for scaffolding this development? In what ways can children's emotional, social and moral understandings be supported through writing instruction? And finally, how might teachers' professional development best be supported in learning ways to improve writing instruction? We hope that the current study assists in encouraging the further pursuit of such important questions.

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## Appendix: Sample Stories, Written during the Instruction Phase of the Study (Blocks 3, 4, and 5) with Scoring Explanation

Three examples of student stories, with an explanation of analyses and scoring, are included here. All wording, sentence structure and grammar in the stories are as the children wrote them. However, spelling, capital letters at the beginning of sentences, periods at the end of sentences, quotation marks, and paragraph breaks have been corrected by adult typists. The stories that achieved higher scores were typically lengthier. This was to be expected, as it generally requires more words to be able to meet the scoring criteria at these higher levels. In each of these three samples, the same score was received for plot structure as for characterization. This, however, was not the case for every student story, as many had a different score on plot structure than they did for characterization.

### Sample Story # 1 (written by conventional instruction group participant)

*The Escape of the T-Rex*

Hi. I am Craig. I am short. I have black hair. I have black eyes and I love hockey. Here are my buddies, Shane and Rick. They're twins (blue eyes). They have brown hair, and

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they are also detectives. It all started when I heard from the Calgary hockey charging out my window and heading for the zoo. I stamped on my feet and called my buddies Shane and Rick. We shot to the zoo but we were too late. On a Sunday afternoon in Calgary Alberta on Coast Lane by the zoo. At night Craig sneaked out of his room and went to the zoo with his paralysers and his sleep powder. He goes in the zoo and hears people in the T-Rex's stomach.

The T-Rex wakes up and grabs Craig. "Please don't eat me," said Craig.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because I will give you dino treats!"

"Dino treats! Where?" said the T-Rex.

"In this bag," said Craig. It was actually sleep powder.

The T-Rex grabbed the sleep powder and immediately fell asleep and dropped Craig and Craig ran away.

When the T-Rex wakes up he wants to eat Craig for sure. He finds Craig pretending to dance with an electronic T-Rex. It was so beautiful. The real T-Rex's eyes flashed. He ran, pushed Craig away and started to dance with the electronical T-Rex. Craig ran for it and got away and soon the T-Rex knew it was electronical.

Craig was playing hand hockey on ice with his friends Shane and Rick. During that hour Craig made a new friend named Brad. Craig made sure they didn't step where there was thin ice. Then the T-Rex came. Craig and his friends went around the thin ice but the T-Rex falls in the part where there was thin ice. He turned into an ice block. Brad tossed the hand hockey ball at the T-Rex's ice cube. He had perfect aim and the ball went through the ice and hit his stomach and the people from the zoo that got eaten fell out. Craig took the T-Rex to the zoo. And from that day on everybody came and looked at the T-Rex. Craig, Shane, Rick and Brad got a party and they live on within their lives.

In this story plot, the author used a sequence of three attempts to solve the original problem, that of a man-eating T-Rex. Two failed attempts were included, involving the pretence of dino treats and the lure of a dancing T-Rex that is actually "electronical." Each of these is an inventive and original idea for a trick. The story rated at level 3 for plot because it contained a series of complications and was brought to closure with a sense of justice restored as the heroes were rewarded and the T-Rex put back where it belonged. Story episodes were weakly linked, however, and insufficient context was included to create rising tension. Thus, due to the lack of integration and cohesiveness, the story was not rated higher than level 3 for plot. When referenced to previous research in narrative development, Level 3 in the scoring rubric corresponds to the storytelling abilities expected of an eight-year-old child.

The story was also scored at level 3 for characterization. The perspective of a second character was mentioned and made explicit in the T-Rex's reactions to the dino treats and the electronic T-Rex. Because this perspective was not carried through to the end of the story, the inner world of the main character was left undeveloped, and his hidden motivations had to be implied, characterization was not rated higher.

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**Story Sample # 2 (written by developmentally-based instruction group participant)**

One bright sunny school day, when all the kids in Calgary were getting ready for school, Kelly was talking to her little sister Megan. She was telling her about school. "You should go to school because it is really fun and you'll get candy," she said. "Your teacher will take you to the movie theatre." There was nothing stopping Megan now. She was off to grade one.

They ate their breakfast really fast and off they went. But school wasn't what Megan expected. They did five pages of Math, read a chapter in Social, answered thirty questions in Science. Then they had lunch. After lunch they did silent reading. Next they cleaned their desks and went home. "That was the most boring time of my life," thought Megan.

The next day Megan didn't want to go to school because she thought school was not fun at all. "We don't play any games," she complained. But Kelly said, "There's going to be treats." "What kind of treats?" asked Megan suspiciously. "I'm not sure . . . it's a surprise," said Kelly, with a giggle. So Megan went to school. She was excited about the surprise. But at 2:00 there still wasn't any treats. No cookies. No candy. No nothing. Just work. "This stinks," thought Megan. She scrunched up her nose and pouted.

But the next day, Kelly and Megan were arguing about going to school. "You should go to school," said Colleen. "Why?" said Megan with a really mad look on her face. Her face was really red, and getting redder by the minute. Finally Kelly said, "I will call the truant officer." "What's a truant officer?" said Megan. "A truant officer checks up on kids who are missing school." Really?" said Megan. "Let's go to school right now." "OK. Let's go," said Kelly.

Again, school was very boring. "I wish we didn't have to go to school," grumbled Megan. "We read two 18 paged stories until lunch. Then we did writing practice until the bell. This is so boring. I need to make myself an adventure. Maybe I will make up a short cut home," thought Megan. Megan got great joy. She was having a ball making up a short cut. But after awhile it wasn't that much fun. She was lost. "Oh no!" Luckily there was a phone booth a few meters away. Megan ran to the phone booth. She looked up the number for the school. Finally at the school the secretary answered. "I'll be right over," said Mrs. Howard the secretary.

Megan learned that going to school can help you, and sometimes it can even save your life.

In this story plot, Kelly tried three times to get Megan to go to school. Although her tricks succeeded, they caused a new problem when Megan decided to alleviate her boredom by creating an adventure of her own and subsequently getting lost. The final sequence of this story introduced a new twist that linked the story back to the initial problem. This novel linkage nested the three attempts within a larger story, integrating the whole story and making it more cohesive. It was not scored higher than a level 4 because the tricks themselves are not qualitatively different from one another. Level 4 in the scoring rubric corresponds to what previous research has suggested is typical narrative development for a ten-year-old child (e.g., McKeough, 1992).

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The story was also scored at level 4 for characterization. The author explicitly included the goals of two contrasting characters. The main character was consistent and believable in her actions, thoughts, and speech. Although there was little insight given into the second character's perspectives, Kelly was shown to understand Megan's motivations (for candy, movies, treats). The interaction between Megan and Kelly's desires added to the tension of the story, and gave it richer social/psychological content.

**Story Sample # 3 (written by developmentally-based instruction group participant)**

One stormy, misty night, back when all creatures could talk, all the bats in Wall Haven were going in and out, frantically calling names,—all but Shadow with his mirror-smooth wings and slick fur and sharp eyes—well, he was listening . . .

"Carl!"—a new name. "Blast! That's the third one today!" he shouted, cursing himself for not acting sooner. "It's for sure it was that impulsive, dim-witted fool, that idiotic no-brain maniac! That Mr. Has-to-rule-the world-cup-face! Arggghhh! Don! You think you can go around kidnapping bats and sucking out their life force and get away with it? No way! Not while I'm around! You're in deep doggie do-do! " he shouted impulsively, all the way to Don's cave.

Now, Shadow had something I call "thinking off the pulse", meaning that he's slightly smarter than most people- in this case, bats- in trickery . . . no, it doesn't mean he thought better when his heart did not beat. It simply meant that he was slightly trickier and able to think faster.

By now, Shadow was calm. Why? He was thinking off the pulse. Shadow in no time at all was sneaking into Don's cave, and finding a perch. Shadow waited for Don to appear . . . and waited . . . and waited. "Heck," Shadow muttered impatiently. Don's sudden appearance out of the shadows at the back of the cave into the light was so surprising that Shadow shouted without thinking, "Ghagh! Look!" Don, on the other hand, thought Shadow was talking to him. So, Don looked. Of course, you know what he saw—nothing! Taking advantage of Don's confusion, Shadow zipped to the back of Don's cave before you could say "Zipperwinkle." Finding the three bats—Shadow was only able to carry one of the unconscious bats at a time—Shadow picked one out and raced out the back entrance. Next thing you know, Don was penetrating your ears with shouts of, "You little nerd!" However, Shadow was already in Wall Haven, putting the bat down at the entrance. He yelled, "Hey! Here's one!" The bat's mother rushed to the entrance, picked up her missing bat, and put him in bed.

Meanwhile, Shadow was already concocting his next trick, by broiling something hot and darn yucky. Shadow shriveled his nose. He wondered many things though. What will Don try on him if he failed? Why did Don want to rule the world with the power of the bats? How could Don still live at the age of 672 years? Shadow did not, and probably never would know these answers. "Whoa!" He shuddered, pulling a back flip to avoid a wall of rock. Now entering Don's cave, he dropped what he was carrying. PLOP! Shadow hid.

Don finally came by. "Sniff . . . sniff . . . what is that smell? Looks like that smell's coming from this nice loaf of my mom's bread. Wonder how it got here? Hmmm . . . I

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just can't resist a bite," Shadow heard him say. Don reached for the loaf. As soon as he took a bite, well, almost a bite, he yelped, ran out to the front entrance and was gone. Several moments later, there was a tremendous gulping from the river, and a voice from Don's cave. "How'd ya like the mustard bread?" Another few moments and Shadow was off with his second bat. When he got to Wall Haven, he set the bat down and said, "Here's another". The bat's mother came rushing up, took him in her wings, and zipped off to put him in bed

The next day, Shadow zipped off again, with something in his talons, and a strange sheen on his fur. Shadow struggled with the weight. It isn't easy to carry metal with a slick coat of liquid on yourself. Shadow still had about a quarter of a mile to fly. Still wondering many things, trying to fly fast, Shadow sped on. He had little hope for success. He was sure that Don would cut him off from entering his cave.

WHAM! This time Shadow had flown straight into a sharp curve, upwards in the mountain. "Ow. I do admit that did hurt." Shadow said in such a way I cannot describe. "Huh? What the . . .?" Shadow muttered. He didn't remember these surroundings. He was getting scared. Then it happened. Shadow thought he saw a face in the grass. He took a step back. Big mistake. Tumbling down a slide of pillows might be fun, but a giant lump of granite? Absolutely not.

Shadow sputtered out dirt. He looked around and saw that Don's cave was just overhead, however. Shadow ached from snout to talons. All the same, Shadow poured his energy into stumbling through the mouth of the cavern.

Shadow thought that he looked like a dope. The trick metal arrow he was carrying looked like a cloven twig that was stuck through him. It was supposed to look like an arrow went right through his body, but it really went around his middle. He wanted Don to see him and think that he was dead. Then Don would go forage for food, and Shadow would get the last bat. Shadow smelled the musty air. Shadow sighed. Shadow was drowsy. He may have dozed off once or twice, but soon enough, Don burst through the mouth of the cavern.

Don stared into space. Don didn't even notice Shadow. Shadow's nose tickled. Time passed. Hours, maybe. Don didn't move. Shadow's nose itched, and soon it ached. He had to sneeze, but it would give him away. He wasn't going to, no, he wouldn't. "Wachoo!" Shadow sneezed. Don spun around, clutched Shadow and roared with laughter.

Shadow was squirming like a worm. Squeak! Out slipped Shadow from Don's grasp. Shadow caught balance and zipped around Don again and again. Finally, as Shadow's last thoughts faded, the ones about how spreading lard on his fur had been such a great backup, Don fell over from dizziness. As Shadow flew to the back of the cavern to get the third bat, his wonders disintegrated. It was all over. He had victory!

Shadow was home. The all too large cries of the bats had stopped, and everything eventually returned to normal. Well, almost. Other than the noise of the party.

In this story plot, scored at level 5, a sequence of three tricks nested within the larger problem of dealing with a powerful oppressor. When referenced to previous research, a score at Level 5 corresponds to the narrative development expected of a twelve-year-old (e.g., McKeough, 1992). The sequences were well linked, and the tricks were each imagina-

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tive. There was some manipulation of Don's specific vulnerabilities, in the mustard-laced bread made to look like his mother's baking. The main character, a positive trickster, was not perfect, but fumbled and fell in his attempts. There was an attempt to include an element of humor in his inadequacies. Tension was created, particularly in the final trick with the growing threat of an impending sneeze. The ending involved a fresh twist, a trick within a trick. Closure was obtained, although there was a sophisticated suggestion that Don was not defeated for good.

The story was also scored at level 5 for characterization. The main character's contrasting traits made him appear more realistic. In addition, rich detail about his inner thoughts, appearance, actions and speech helped to create a more believable character. Some detail was included about the second character's perspective but this was much more limited than for the main character. Overall, however, the rich detail included in this story supports the creation of life-like characters. Some confusion does persist, despite the elaborate detail, and this seems to stem primarily from gaps in linking the author's viewpoint with that of the reader.


## CCCC Tribal College Faculty Fellowship

The CCCC Tribal College Faculty Fellowship offers financial aid to selected faculty members currently working at tribally controlled colleges to attend the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) March 11–14 in San Francisco. We are offering two Tribal College Faculty Fellowships in the amount of $750 each.

Featuring over 500 sessions focusing on teaching practices, writing and literacy programs, language research, history, theory, information technologies, and professional and technical communication, the annual CCCC meeting provides a forum for thinking, learning, networking, and presenting research on the teaching and learning of writing. With this fellowship, CCCC hopes to create new opportunities for tribal college faculty members to become involved in CCCC and for CCCC to carry out its mission of serving as a truly representative national advocate for language and literacy education.

**How to Apply:** By November 15, 2008, please submit an application letter (on institutional letterhead) describing:

- Who you are as a teacher and what you teach at your tribal college;
- What your research interests are;
- What you hope to gain from the experience of attending CCCC (how it could help you in your teaching or research).

Send your application letter to CCCC Administrative Liaison, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; or cccc@ncte.org.

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